

Empire Store (Gage Hotel)
501-505 State Street
Erie
Erie County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5142

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

EMPIRE STORES (Gage Hotel)

Location: 501-505 State Street (southeast corner of State Street and East 5th Street) city of Erie, Erie County, Pennsylvania 16501

Present Owner: Mrs. Charmaine LaSarge, 4243 Albans Road, Houston, Texas 77005

Present Occupant: Mr. and Mrs. Clyde Hartley

Present Use: Boarding House, 30 boarders.

Demolition of the property will be scheduled on receipt of the written acceptance of the HABS report. The cleared site will be used for offstreet parking in support of the recently completed, and adjacent Richford Arms Apartments.

Significance: The buildings are an integral part of Erie's first substantial business district (brick buildings), and reflect the City's commercial expansion during the mid-nineteenth century.

PART I. HISTORIC INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Dates of erection: 1848-49 and 1852-53
2. Architect: Unknown
3. Original and subsequent owners: References to the chain of title to the land upon which the structures stand are in the Office of the Recorder of Deeds, Erie County Court House, Erie, Pennsylvania.
 - 1847 Deed, December 9, 1847, recorded in Volume S, page 321. Solomon Townsend to Henry Cadwell. 38' front by 80' depth.
 - 1852 Deed, July 26, 1852, recorded in Volume W, page 962. John and Elvira Moore to Henry Cadwell. 19' front by 82½' depth.
 - 1858 Deed, June 4, 1858, recorded in Volume 10, page 250. Henry Cadwell to John Trissler by sheriff sale. 57' front.

- 1860 Deed, August 7, 1860, recorded in Volume 13, page 203. John and Elizabeth N. Trissler to Harriet Reed Lyon. 19' front.
 - 1863 Deed, December 21, 1863, recorded in Volume 18, page 25. John and Elizabeth N. (Widow of John Trissler) Elliot to Harriet R. Lyon. 38' front.
 - 1865 Deed, November 15, 1865, recorded in Volume 21, page 730. W. Lyon (guardian of Harriet C. Lyon only child of Harriet R. Lyon) to Bernhart and Isaac Baker, and Jacob E. Ostheimer. 57' front.
 - 1881 Deed, August 30, 1881, recorded in Volume 70, page 82. Bernhart Baker to Henry Baker.
 - 1890 Deed, December 1, 1890, recorded in Volume 99, page 677. Henry Baker to Isaac Baker.
 - 1895 Deed, January 1, 1895, recorded in Volume 113, page 391. Jacob E. Ostheimer to Isaac Baker.
 - 1920 Deed, June 1, 1920, recorded in Volume 255, page 195. Isaac Baker to Andrew P. Weschler. 57' front.
 - 1922 Deed, December 30, 1922, recorded in Volume 269, page 605. Andrew P. Weschler to Jacob Roth.
 - 1935 Deed, May 20, 1935, recorded in Volume 255, page 34. Jacob Roth to Security Peoples Trust Company by sheriff sale.
 - 1945 Deed, October 31, 1945, recorded in Volume 369, page 418. Security Peoples Trust Company to Leo J. Moore.
 - 1946 Deed, October 31, 1946, recorded in Volume 490, page 284. Leo J. Moore to Esther Allen and James D. Baldwin.
 - 1950 Deed, November 24, 1950, recorded in Volume 582, page 6. Esther Allen and James D. Baldwin to Ernest J. Bourgart.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Unknown
 5. Original plan and construction: Not available
 6. Alterations and additions: The two buildings were joined in the late 1860s, the walls cut through, and the entire first floor converted to a retail store. A doorway with enclosed exterior stairs to second story was added on the East 5th Street side. City directories indicate that the large room on the second floor was made into apartments around 1929.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

An interesting feature of this property is that it was sold to Henry Cadwell in 1847 on the condition that he erect within one year of the date of acquisition, either one building covering the entire 38' front lot, or two buildings covering the same space. Cadwell proceeded to erect one building designed to accommodate two stores which he called "Empire Stores". He subsequently acquired another lot in 1852 consisting of 19' frontage to the north upon which he erected another building. Cadwell's construction of these buildings was acknowledgement that the center of Erie's business district was shifting from French to State Street, and south to the Park.

Cadwell's buildings were sold in 1865 to an up-and-coming family of merchants led by Bernhart Baker. The family had emigrated to the United States in 1848 from Germany. Baker's partner Jacob Ostheimer (also a relative) had followed in 1855.

A distinctive provision of the Empire block was the roomy hall on the second floor, available for public meetings. It was called Liberty Hall. Here Captain Graham drilled the Home Guards during the Civil War when there was danger of rebel attack from the Lake.

The Empire block served as the site of the Isaac Baker & Sons clothing firm until 1910. Since then it has housed a variety of retail establishments on the ground floor while the upper stories were increasingly devoted to boarding rooms and flats becoming the Gage Hotel in 1949.

C. Sources of Information

1. Original architectural drawings: Not available.
2. Old views: There are two views of the buildings in the photographic file of the Erie County Historical Society. View (1) is an advertising illustration which appeared in local newspapers and city directories of the 1850s. View (2) is a lithograph which appeared in Everts, Ensign & Everts, Combination Atlas Map of Erie County, 1876.
3. Bibliography:

Biographical Dictionary of Erie County. Erie: S.B. Nelson, 1896, P. 513.

Erie Gazette, various issues 1849, 1850s.

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Erie Observer, various issues 1850s.

History of Erie County Pennsylvania. Chicago: Warner, Beers & Company, 1884. Vol. II, P. 865.

Miller, John. A Twentieth Century History of Erie Pennsylvania. Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1909. Vol. I, p. 620.

Prepared by: John R. Claridge
Executive Director
Erie County Historical
Society
June, 1980

PART II ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character:

The Empire Stores/Gage Hotel is a large scale mid-19th century commercial structure. Its design is a vernacular derivation of the Italiante style, and is characterized by its proportions, pedimented window lintels, bracketed cornice, and neo-classical entrance of pilasters supporting an entablature and a low pediment.

2. Condition of fabric:

Over the years the building has undergone substantial neglect and much of the buildings features, brackets, cornices, moldings and window ornamentations have fallen-off or been removed from the building, particularly on the west face of the building. Numerous code and safety violations found in the building do not permit the re-issuance of a license for the continued operation of the boarding house.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions:

The buildings dimensions are 56 feet wide on the State Street side and 70 feet deep on the East 5th Street side.

2. Foundation: Brick and stone

3. Wall construction, finish and color:

Plywood covers the openings at the first floor level. Each side of the building includes nine openings on the second, third and fourth floors. These openings have ornamental stone window hoods, some of which have fallen off.

4. Structural system:

Load bearing brick walls. Of particular note are the inverted relieving arches in the basement. These inverted arches indicate that the original design featured such an arch system to distribute the weight load over the entire brick foundation wall.

5. Openings:

- a. Windows: The first floor windows are boarded up. Those on the top three floors are one over one, double hung sash with applied masonry window hoods and bracketed sills.
- b. Doorways and doors: The ground floor entrance on the State Street side is a temporary plywood door. The East 5th Street side entrance is through an enclosed stairway leading to the second floor.

6. Roof:

- a. Shape: Flat
- b. Cornice: The wooden cornice is ornamented with block modillions and supported by heavy brackets (which remain only on the East Fifth Street side).

C. Description of the Interior:

1. Floor plan:

Floor plan sketches are appended for the basement level, first floor, and typical second and third and fourth floors. The store area on the first floor level is uninterrupted space with exception to the supporting metal posts, and the three sided barricade around the stairway to the basement. Two small rooms were added to the rear of the building and contain lavatory facilities. Side entrance on the East 5th Street side of the

building provided access to the street level. The ceiling is metal and the supporting posts are fluted. The layout of the upper three floors are typical throughout. The check-in counter for room registration is found immediately at the second floor entrance. Small rooms shown along the south wall of the building are a combination of showers, toilets, and baths. The skylight shaft located in the center hall of the upper floors is the only outstanding interior feature. Other interior features are plastered walls, pine flooring, and the building is heated with City steam. Room areas are partitioned (not shown) for a total of 33 rooms.

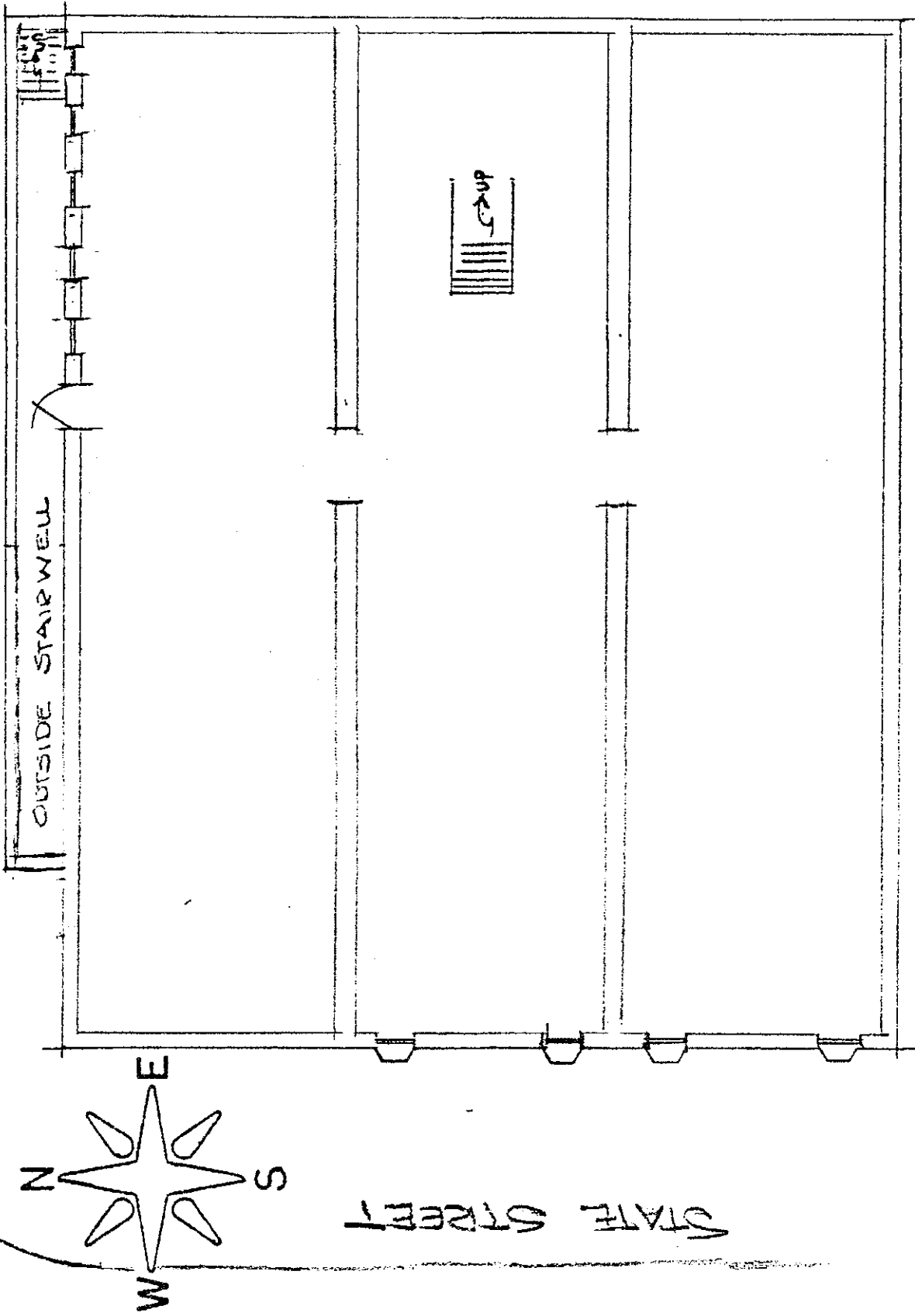
- D. Site: Located on a corner lot, this building is of the same scale as most of the surrounding buildings, except for the larger structure directly beside it on State Street. The original placement of the building on this site represented the acknowledgement of the shifting of Erie's business district from French to State Street.

Prepared by Norb Juniewicz
 Supervisor of Planning
 Office of Policy Planning
 and Management, City of
 Erie
 June 1980

PART III PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the City of Erie in compliance with Executive Order 11593 and a Memorandum of Agreement with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation as a mitigative effort in the completion of the proposed demolition of the building. John A. Burns, A.I.A. and Emily J. Harris were the HABS project coordinators. Photographs were taken by Nelson Photographers in June 1980. The written data was compiled by Norb Juniewicz of the Erie Office of Policy Planning and Management in June 1980, and prepared for transmittal to the Library of Congress by Robert S. Lange, of the HABS office in August 1980.

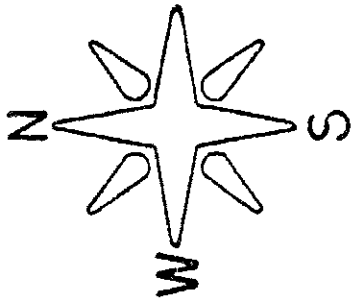
EAST 5 STREET



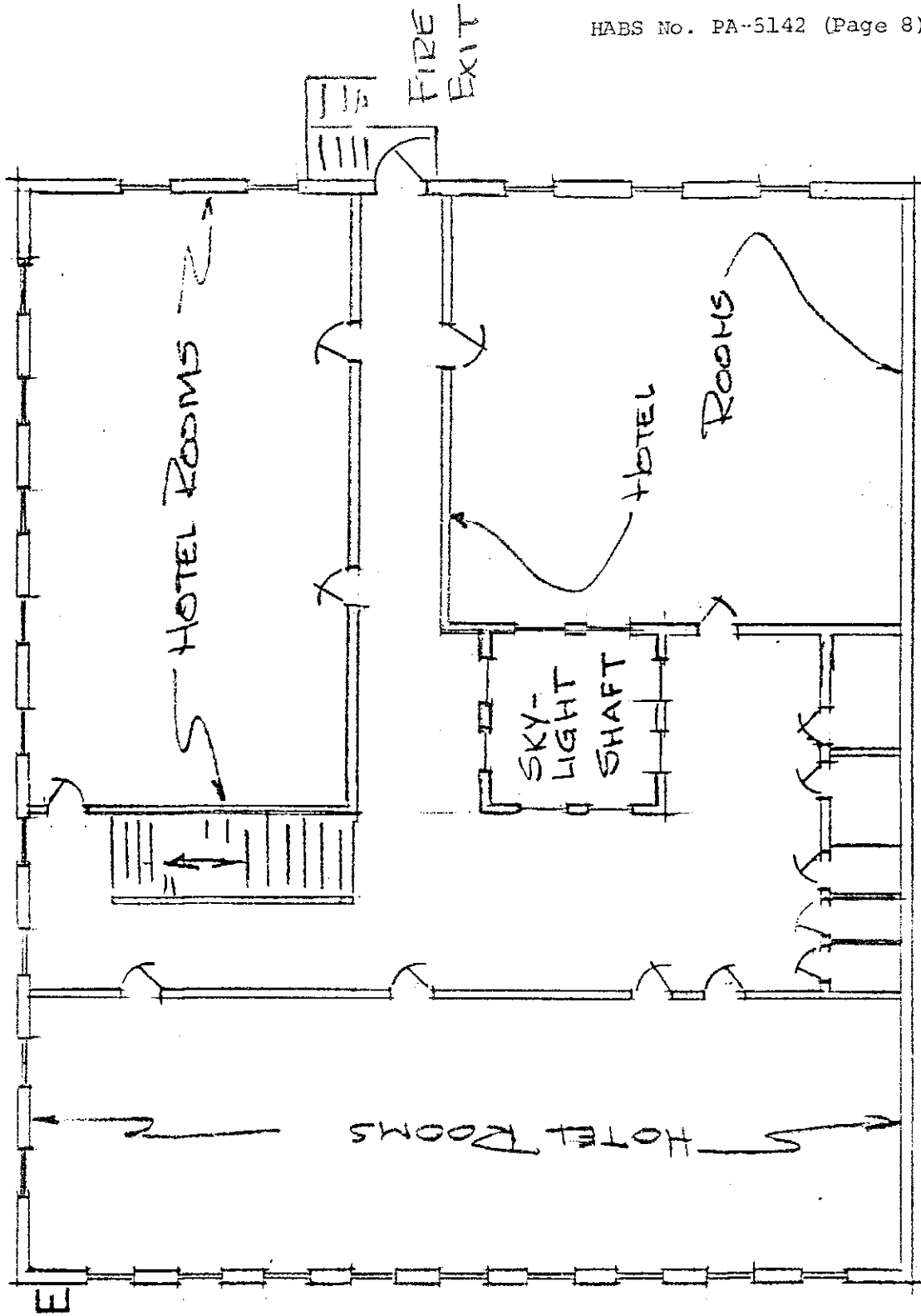
PLAN - BASEMENT LEVEL - GAGE HOTEL

RGL

EAST 5 STREET



STATE STREET



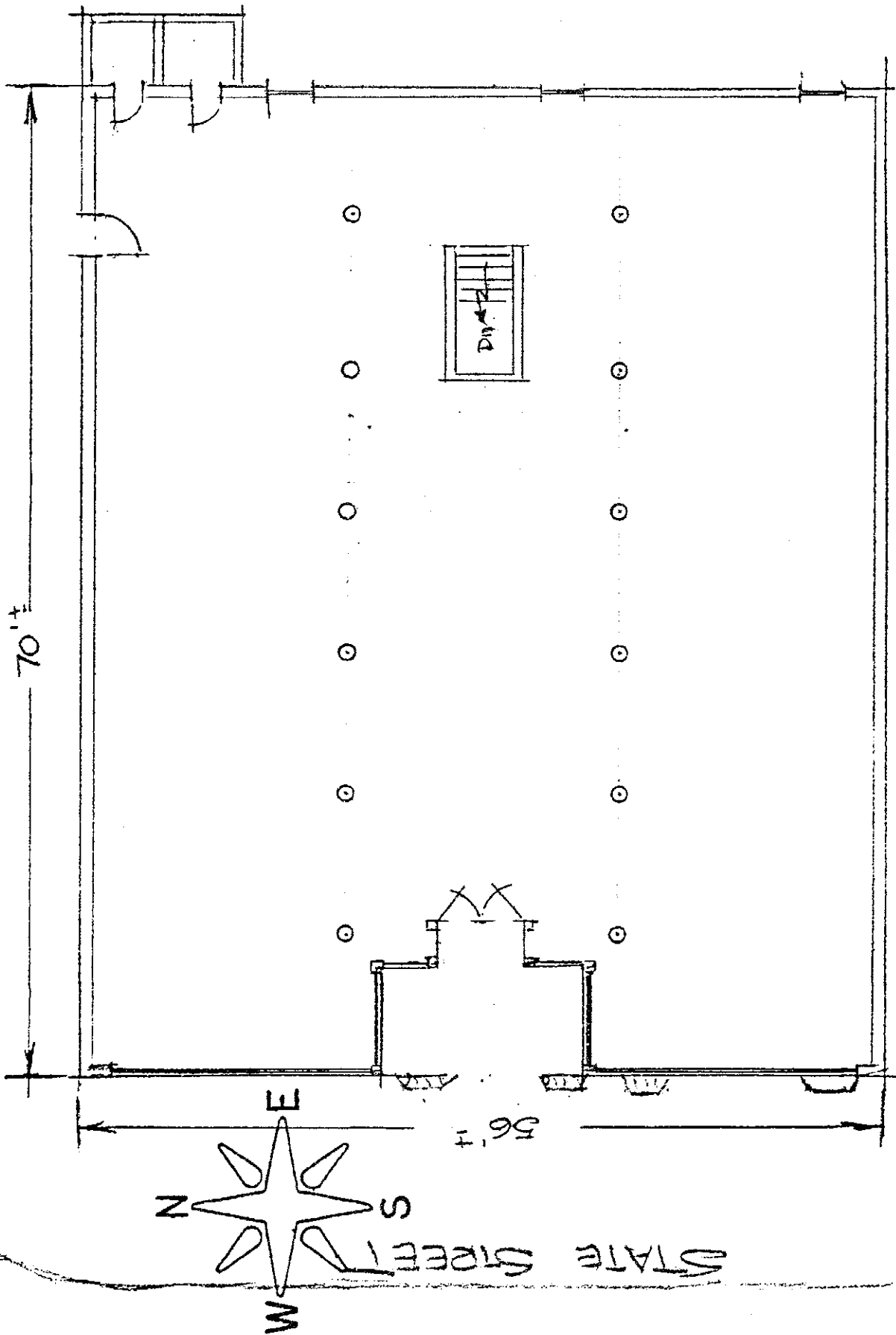
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TYPICAL PLAN - UPPER FLOORS - GAGE HOTEL
2nd, 3rd & 4th

RSL

EAST 5 STREET



PLAN - FIRST FLOOR - GAGE HOTEL
RGL